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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW

Brian Lehrer: It's the Brian Lehrer show on WNYC, and if it's Friday, it's the day for Ask the Mayor here on the Brian Lehrer Show – my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio, Fridays at 11:05. Our phone number 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0 – or you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag, #AsktheMayor. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, Brian. How are you doing today?

Lehrer: I'm doing all right, thank you, and I want to begin with some questions about schools. September 10th is getting very close, obviously, and just yesterday, I see you announced there would be separate teachers for the same students for their at-home and in-person days in the blended system you're planning. Our education reporter is getting indications that the principals in many cases, won't have the staffing for that or the money for that extra staff and Chancellor Carranza promised substitute teachers and other reinforcements, but gave no indication who is coming, and when, so here's my first question. Increasingly people are saying this isn't ready, even if it's right and it delay is inevitable. Are you now considering a delay?

Mayor: Look, Brian, we have been planning on September 10th for months and months. It is exactly when school begins every year and yeah, there's additional things we've had to work out this year to say the least, but step-by-step, these things are being resolved via announcement yesterday of the agreement with the UFT – that basically is going to allow for a team teaching approach that is going to make it very consistent and well-coordinated, how different teachers work together to serve kids, whether they're in the classroom or at home on that day. I do hear the concerns of the principals and that answer is coming to them very, very shortly, because as was true before the beginning of every school year, there's a last minute push to align the staffing levels, get the right people in the right places. We are going to have thousands of additional teachers available between the DOE personnel right now, certified teachers who don't teach in the classrooms, they're coaches, or teachers, or administrators, whatever they may be, who will be brought into the classroom, the folks in the ATR pool, substitute teachers that we used every year, many of whom are ready to go. So that pool is ready and it's going to be plugged in now to each school, and by the first day of school, every one of our schools will have the teaching compliment they need.

Lehrer: And all of these teachers who are going to do the remote track will be trained sufficiently to be remote educators?

Mayor: Well, remember every single one of them has been doing remote since March, even though none of us expected it, none of us preferred it to in person. It is the reality that every existing teacher in the DOE has now had four months of remote teaching under their belt. Some of them continued over the summer doing it. A lot of work has been done to keep training the teachers. It will be ongoing. I mean, we're doing something on a scale that's never been done before, and teacher-professional development happens throughout the year in a normal year. It's obviously going to keep happening now to keep improving the remote teaching. But I will tell you, teachers are taking a lot of this upon themselves in a good way. Educators, throughout this experience have been sharing best practices with each other, working together to figure out creative approaches. There is a tremendous spirit of ingenuity among our educators. They want to get it right for our kids and they are figuring out and we're going to keep providing the support to help them do it better. But again, you know, Brian, I don't think anything replaces in-person learning. So I actually think those hours in the school building are going to be far higher impact, but we will keep helping teachers to improve the remote no matter what.

Lehrer: I do understand the Chancellor has submitted a waiver request with the State that would allow a delay if you choose. Is that right? And if so, where does that stand?

Mayor: Well, we've got a lot of moving parts here, Brian, because the State last school year was very clear that funding would be consistent even if we went remote, that the fact that we had to be remote would not be held against us, and we need those answers again this year. So the central thing that the Chancellor is talking to the State about is we have a lot of kids who are going to be all remote. We don't know, obviously at some point what our overall situation will be. We, we hope and pray for a vaccine quickly, but we have to be ready to move in different directions. We need to know we're going to be held harmless in terms of law and funding if a lot of our kids are remote or if we ever have to, at some point in the future go to all remote.

Lehrer: Well, what do you know, as of now, because if I have this right Chancellor Carranza says, if Governor Cuomo goes through with a possible 20 percent funding cut to schools, that the city will start all remotely on September 10th, and is that is that right, and when would you know?

Mayor: There's a different question there. The waiver question is to confirm that for kids who are going all remote, they will still be treated as having reached the mandatory 180 days, and again, if we ever have to take the system at any point to all remote, that that we are going to be given the same funding, the same legal – be given the same legal credit, if you will, for that educational time is a different question than the budget question. Right now we keep fighting against any budget cuts from the State, and I know the legislature is deeply concerned, and most importantly, we're working to get the long-term borrowing that would allow us to handle our own budget challenges, and God forbid the worst state cuts to handle those as well, and there was much more momentum now in Albany to get that long-term borrowing done, but we're far from complete.

So the question of what the State is going to do is absolutely unclear both in terms of the budget and the long-term borrowing, but that's not affecting what we're doing right now. Right now is just full speed ahead.

Lehrer: So this would not affect the opening of schools on September 10th, to be clear?

Mayor: No, because the State has to date been slowing down its reimbursements, but we have not experienced a full blown cut, and again, even God forbid, if there was a cut scenario, we could compensate for that with long-term borrowing, as you know, the City Council Speaker Johnson has come out strongly in favor of long-term borrowing. The City Council has on its agenda for its next meeting, a vote in favor of long-term borrowing. We're seeing more momentum in Albany. That piece would answer all of the short-term funding questions. We've got to get that done, and by the way, the labor unions are deeply involved in the effort too, to get long term borrowing. There's a lot of energy in this effort right now.

Lehrer: Let's take a phone call on schools. Regina in Manhattan. You're on WNYC. Hi Regina you're on with the Mayor.

Question: Hi Brian. Hi Mayor. My question is about the new podcast, Nice White Parents in the podcast, the Mayor's response or lack thereof on true integration was critiqued. With students' heavy reliance on technology this year, do you Mayors foresee any challenges to accessibility and majority-minority schools that will further create a divide between BIPOC students and their wealthier white student peers?

Mayor: I don't know if I could hear all of the questions, so I may need a clarification, but I think what I'm hearing is am I concerned about disparities in education and the difference with remote and in person? I mean, absolutely. I'll give an answer and if I've missed the question, just confirm, I, I think one of the greatest arguments for in-person education is that it actually addresses disparity much better than remote education.

Question: Well, I was referring to the podcast Nice White Parents, where they typically talk about—

Mayor: I don't know what you're referring to. I'm sorry. I couldn't even hear what the name of it.

Lehrer: Are you aware of the New York Times podcast, Nice White Parents about school integration and lack thereof in Brooklyn and around the city?

Mayor: No.

Lehrer: So you haven't, you haven't heard – nobody's pointed out that podcast to you. I'm surprised.

Mayor: There's a lot going on, Brian. I don't want to hear about every podcast, but go ahead, go ahead and Regina, if you want to frame a follow-up question, go ahead.

Question: Yeah, I'm in the podcast, they primarily talk about how your public schools are largely segregated and they – and so with the pandemic and largely potentially being online, I would suspect that there's going to be a lot of problems with accessibility in underprivileged communities. I was wondering if the Mayor has anything to address that and if this may be a good time to address integration of schools?

Mayor: Thank you, and I'm sorry, I just couldn't understand from the beginning, now it makes sense. At first yes, in terms of what I think is profound disparities running through our society – it's the entire reason I ran in everything we've been doing from day one is to deal with the tale of two cities – I think as we go through this school year, we're going to have to intensely focus on kids who are not getting their fair share. Again, the best way from my point of view is for those kids to be in-person learning as much as humanly possible, because I think that's when we can address those disparities best. For kids who are remote only, I think it's really, really tough. Of course, extra efforts are being made to get kid, tutoring, guidance, et cetera, online if they need extra help. And this is particularly true for English language learners, special ed kids. But the remote context does not allow that to be done at all as effectively as in-person. That is the truth. So our central effort here is to show people safe, well-functioning schools to maximize the number of parents who feel comfortable getting their kids back to those schools, particularly if they have greater needs that need to be addressed.

On the bigger question, we've made a series of steps to address the need to diversify our schools and address segregation in the city. Now remind you, some of them have not gotten the support I think they deserve, like ending the standardized test for specialized high schools and ensuring that they represent this whole city, which they clearly don't. I've put that out very forthrightly and a lot of opposition came back. But we are going to be doing a lot more to address some of the barriers to a more diverse classroom. It's been working at the local level. That's where we found the greatest success, from the ground up. But I also will say, as I've said, Brian, on this show before. I really wish people would look at the foundation. The foundation is not the school system. It is housing, it's jobs, it's economic segregation. It's a segregated city. The school system can't solve that.

Lehrer: People can be moved from neighborhood to neighborhood as Kamala Harris pointed out in her debate with Joe Biden. Right?

Mayor: And I have been really clear about the fact that in some neighborhoods where communities are close together, there's a lot of that we can do and are doing. In other neighborhoods, it's a lot harder. I don't think something like large scale school busing is a good idea for that purpose. I just don't. I've said that many times. I think we can do a lot to make our schools more representative and inclusive, but I really think that debate – I will believe it is an honest debate, when people talk about the economic underpinnings and the housing underpinnings more. And not just act like the schools can solve the problem alone. They simply can't. We can make a lot of progress, but I'll argue with anyone at any time, it cannot be the schools alone. You want to do real – I don't know what Nice White Parents is about. So then people in predominantly white neighborhoods, let's desegregate the neighborhoods and you will desegregate the schools. That is the better way to think about this from my point of view.

Lehrer: One more follow up that relates to the podcast, Nice White Parents. You announced outdoor learning just this week and set a deadline of today for principals to submit their plans. I'm going to ask you if you think everybody is going to meet that deadline, if that's realistic? But the outdoor learning plan is being criticized as another driver of race and class disparity. And your call for lesser funded schools to ask wealthier PTAs to share resources with them, A is it too fast to expect results on that for September 10th on such a complicated and fraught request? And doesn't the history of those kinds of requests suggest it's just not going to happen to a meaningful degree? This is a sort of Nice White Parents issue.

Mayor: Well, again, I just want to say if we're going to have a serious discussion in this city, I mean, I find it – I mean, you have to be real blunt, Brian. You're talking about Nice White Parents, there's a podcast. Everyone's feeling very good about themselves, that they're talking about the issue. You really want to change things in this city? Then everyone better change a lot of the way we live more foundationally. If you just talk about it and feel self-satisfied, God bless you. That's not actually going to change things. What changes things is redistribution of wealth. Tax the wealthy at a much higher level, make sure that working people who in this city are overwhelmingly people of color get higher wages so they can afford better housing, help us create the affordable housing and neighborhoods that so many times there's been a NIMBY effort to stop. And the NIMBY effort has sometimes come from people, I would've thought were more to the left, not just people more to the right. So if we're going to have an honest discussion in the city, which a lot of times bluntly, elite outlets and elite context don't want to have this honest conversation. You really want to break down segregation in New York City? Then let's deal with the economic reality. The economic reality is pervading the racial reality as well. And I just feel like this is a lot of cocktail party comfort going on rather than people honestly dealing with this issue. Help me tax the wealthy, help me redistribute wealth, help me build affordable housing in a white communities, if you want desegregation. If you do not want to do all those things, then you're not serious about desegregation. To your question – yes, go ahead.

Lehrer: Well, I was going to say, understood. But the immediate question is what do you say to critics of the outdoor learning plan, who say it takes a lot of money and it's going to be another driver of disparity from school to school?

Mayor: Brian, I'm losing patience respectfully, because there's so many people who don't know what the hell they're talking about. Love to criticize, and don't even bother to do the basic research on what's going on. I've been asked in press conferences repeatedly. We were on a football field in the Bronx with a principal at a high school in a community of color. And he said, it's my high school, this football field's next to my high school. And I'll use this football field. It doesn't cost him anything. Principals can use their schoolyards, their courtyards. They want to close off a street next to the school. So long as it's a street, we can close off. It's not a bus route or something. It doesn't cost them anything. I answered this. The Chancellor answered it. People aren't listening, Brian. You guys, if you're serious, listen. If you're serious about answers –

Lehrer: I think people say it's the tents.

Mayor: Give me a break. The tents are one piece of a much bigger equation. And this is again, if we're going to have a serious discussion or just a superficial discussion. If you want to have a

serious discussion, what we said is we got a lot of requests from principals, could they do outdoor learning? We said, yes, you can do outdoor learning. By the way no one said the deadline was today. We have corrected the journalists who absolutely mangled that. The deadline was, if you got it by today, you'll get an answer for next week. If you want to put in an application in next week, you'll get an answer the week after. It's fine. But there's lots of ways to do outdoor that don't cost a thing. And a PTA that does have a lot of money should share. We said the same thing with parks conservancies. Again, let's stop the cocktail party madness. If you actually are serious and you're a wealthy PTA, share with a school nearby that doesn't have a lot of money. That is addressing the tale of two cities.

Lehrer: Turler, in Manhattan. You on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Turler.

Question: Hi, thanks for taking my call. I have a restaurant on Upper West Side, HDFC building. And I'm a restaurant who closed the dining room a couple of months ago. Now the I asked the HDFC core, they can lower my rent? They cannot because they have obligation on the City. And I have 40 employees. I'm doing the takeout and delivery. And I need the help. Otherwise we are going to be closed by the end of this year, if they cannot help us. Because we've finished all the PPP money, everything. And we've been there 40 years, Upper West Side, and we need help.

Mayor: Turler, look, first of all, would you please make sure to give your information to WNYC because we want to see if there's some way we can help you and help the building owners to work out an accommodation. There's a bunch of different things we can do to help you to tide over. Our Small Business Services Department constantly is working to mediate between landlords and small businesses and they can get you other types of support as well. So please give your number to WNYC. But I think the bigger answer here Brian, is we're right now trying to figure out, you know, obviously for some restaurants, the outdoor dining has been tremendously helpful. We're trying to figure out how we can maximize that going forward. We're trying to figure out if there is some fair standard that is healthy and safe, but also allow indoor dining to come back. We're working on that right now. It'll be a very rigorous standard if we get to it. But we're trying to answer the very valid question people are asking. But I want to also remind people, you know this of course should have been done in a federal stimulus to provide help for small businesses again. The one ray of light here, I don't know what's going to happen in the election nor do you. But I do believe if there's a Biden presidency, that will be a major stimulus very, very quickly. So I would say to a small business owner, you know, where they're fighting to hang on, to keep hanging on, we're going to try and help you, case by case all we can. But I want to believe with an election now 68 days away or whatever the number is, that there may be bigger help on the way that could really provide a lot of small businesses with the ability to get to a vaccine. And I think a vaccine is probably at some point in the spring at this rate. So I'm hoping we can help people hang on to that point.

Lehrer: I gather you have an announcement to make today that the city is going to start granting sports field permits for certain groups? Is that right?

Mayor: That's exactly right. Brian in the middle of all the challenges is some good news. So I actually was a Little League coach in baseball with my kids. And the folks from the sports

leagues that do so much good with our kids, they've been appealing for the ability to open up. We're going to grant that. We're working on the exact day right now. I think it's going to be September 15th, but we are working on the exact day. But what it means is Parks Department will provide permits for baseball, softball, soccer, flag football, non-contact lacrosse, and cricket, which is very popular in lot of our neighborhoods. I want to thank Council member Justin Brannan who's been really pushing us to do this. And an old friend of Eddie Albert from the Prospect Park Baseball Association who has been giving me a lot of insight about how we could do it. But it will come with full adherence to State and World Health Organization guidelines. So face mask, whenever people can wear them, social distancing when not playing, limit on the number of spectators. And this'll be like schools. We will keep allowing this as we stay under that three percent citywide test positive number. Which thankfully Brian, we've been well below now for months. But that will be the standard.

Lehrer: And just to be clear, is this just for youth sports or also for some adult sports?

Mayor: Well, again, the first focus is on youth sports leagues. That's where most of the applications are from. But to the best of my understanding, it will be across the board. Because the point here is we needed to figure out healthy standards. And with these standards in place if folks follow them, we can keep it healthy. It's obviously an outdoor activity. Now I'll also say bluntly, any league that doesn't follow them, we're going to have a three strikes and you're out. That if a league of teams in the league violate these standards and we see that happen three times, then that league will not be allowed to continue.

Lehrer: Cynthia in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi Cynthia.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. Hi Brian. Thanks for taking my call. I'm calling on behalf of my partner, who is an Instacart worker. He purchases and delivers groceries to New York City and the boroughs. Ever since the outdoor dining started occurring there's been a lack of parking. So him and a lot of the other workers are experiencing a lot of citations. They are forced to double park, park in commercial zones. And I'm not at all advocating for getting rid of the restaurants. Like not at all. I'm just wondering if there can be some leniency or some kind of pardons for these citations until things normalize? We've appealed, you know, through the process. And like, and I, we say the exact same thing that I'm just telling you. And they just get denied. So it just feels like at this point, like he's just working to pay off these citations.

Mayor: No, I really appreciate the question Cynthia because we don't want to solve one problem and create another. So first of all, will you please also give your information to WNYC so our team can follow up with you today? Look, I appreciate the way you said it. Because the outdoor dining has brought back tens of thousands of jobs, and it's been very good for this city and for saving these restaurants. We want to keep that going, but we don't want to penalize folks who are doing grocery delivery, which is more depended on now than ever. And they're also, we want to keep their jobs intact. So let me see what we can do to figure out a solution here. It's a very fair question. And yet you're actually the first person that I can remember raising it to me. I'm glad you did, because this is the kind of thing we have to make sure that we're addressing the whole equation. So get, you know, follow up directly, but we'll also come back with a bigger policy on this.

Lehrer: Cynthia, hang. Amil in Queens, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello Amil.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor and Brian. The Mayor placed a hundred plus inmates from Rikers Island in a local upscale hotel in Fresh Meadows. The Wyndhan Garden in at \$200 a night. Not informing the neighborhood beforehand, no community involvement, using the pandemic as his excuse to do this. This has been going on since June and was told it was a temporary situation. In the beginning they were unsupervised leaving the hotel panhandling in the area, stealing in CVS and vandalizing cars in the adjacent parking lot. When will they be removed so our neighborhood can get back to the way it was? An upper middle class neighborhood that were safe to walk the streets day and night without feeling threatened.

Mayor: Well, first of all, I don't want anyone to feel uncomfortable in their own neighborhood. And we're going to – and if there's specific problems at that site, we've got to address the problems. So please give your information to WNYC so our team can follow up with you. I will only say that some of the facts you laid out don't jive with what I understand. We had a crisis in March and April, where we had a lot of people in an unsafe situation in jails. We had to be careful in the middle of the intense time of the pandemic, not to have a huge amount of infection in the jails that could have killed people who were in there even for minor crimes. We made a careful decision. We worked with the DAs, we worked with the State. The State [inaudible] but I don't have any knowledge of a single location with a hundred former inmates. That just doesn't jive with what I know. What we'll do is follow up on whatever's going on in the neighborhood with Homeless Services, NYPD, whatever it takes to create a safer environment. But I don't know of any place where there's that kind of concentration of former inmates. So we'll check that fact.

Lehrer: We'll take you information Amil.

Mayor: Brian, can I give you an update? I'm sorry to jump in. I have one thing I said wrong, I need to fix. You asked about adults and the permits from the Parks Department. And if my memory serves you are a softball player yourself? And I have been too, so I think it was a noble question. And what I'm told is the permits are just for the youth leagues, but any field that is not taken is as always available first come first serve to whoever comes upon it. So adults will still have those opportunities for the fields that are not reserved for youth leagues.

Lehrer: Got it. But the permitting – and yes the long lamented WNYC softball season would have had its last permit on the North Meadow of Central Park on Monday. We know that's gone.

Mayor: But there'll be a new season and a new location in 2021, right? Let's hold out that hope.

Lehrer: We hope. But the permits that are, that people can start applying for today, the actual permits are for youth sports to be clear?

Mayor: Yes. And that conversation with the youth leagues actually has been going on for months. The Department of Parks asked for initial interest, and then we've been trying to figure

out really what we could do, healthy, you know, in a healthy and safe manner. So the leagues have been getting ready in the meantime. They'll be able to start up this coming month.

So the leagues have been getting ready, in the meantime. They'll be able to start up this coming month.

Lehrer: The caller [inaudible] in Queens, obviously there's been a situation on the Upper West Side. That's been much in the news homeless men from, I guess, a troubled shelter population of some kind put in hotels in that neighborhood, and it's looking now from the news this week that you'll get sued by one side, if you don't relocate them back to shelters and sued by the other side, if you do. So, where are you on that today?

Mayor: It's a typical day as mayor of New York City, I would say. It's really straightforward to me. We had a healthcare crisis. I just mentioned the fact that we had to get people out of our jail system. It was too crowded in the midst of the height of the pandemic. Equally, we had to get people moved out and spread out in our shelter system. There's a lot of concern, a lot of valid concern. We sent in our health professionals to determine, and they also affirmed we needed to use different spaces, more spaces. That's why we went into hotels on a temporary basis. We don't want to be in hotels. We'd never wanted to be in hotels. I put out a plan three years ago about how we are going to consistently get out of hotels in this city as part of addressing homelessness. and we've actually moved that quite extensively. This is a temporary situation. So what I've said, and I don't care who sues me is this was always meant to be temporary. As the health situation continues to improve, and thank God our shelter population has gone down so there's more space, we will start taking people back from hotels, into the existing shelters, but only as it is safe and healthy. I also want to say a lot of people on the Upper West Side have, despite some of what you've seen in tabloids, a lot of people in the Upper West Side have said, "you know what, we understand these folks are homeless. It's not their fault, there but for the grace of God go we, and we're going to help them and show compassion for them," and yeah, there's quality of life issues, we're all going to work together to resolve those too, but I don't want to present it as just one voice of the Upper West Side. I think a lot of people have put Upper West Side have really tried to support folks who have fallen on hard times while at the same time, want to make sure of course the neighborhood is safe and the quality of life is protected.

Lehrer: Last thing before we run out of time. As I'm sure you saw, you took hits at the Republican convention last night, most directly from Rudy Giuliani for not cracking down on crime, as they portray you, with shootings and murders up this year. Trump himself said he could solve the problem in a few hours. Want to respond?

Mayor: Yeah. I mean, how much time do you got? I'll give you the simple response. Rudy Giuliani, who did so much to systematically divide this city and created so much pain, has no validity as someone to speak to this moment in history where people are demanding racial justice, they're demanding change, rightfully. Rudy was someone who richly contributed to 400 years of oppression in America. We are working constantly to create what really we need, which is safety and justice at the same time, and actually until this pandemic, we had proven that you could reduce arrests radically, reduced incarceration radically, end Stop-and-Frisk, do all these things and reduce crime simultaneously, and this pandemic was the perfect storm that just

unraveled so much of our society, and there has been a horrible uptick in shootings, but it will be stopped. Right now, gun arrests are up around the same level as last year. Community and police are working together in the most affected neighborhoods in common cause. A lot is moving in the right direction, but it can't fully resolve until our society is back to something more normal, our court system is working.

So what Trump and Giuliani was saying, first, no resemblance to reality. Second, the underlying racism in everything they say that it's not even dog whistles anymore. It's just overt racism. It's opposition to a city that is a majority people of color. It's opposition to the idea of New York City as a place where people of all backgrounds can find mutual respect. It's opposition to progressive policies that believe is not just about arresting people and throwing them into jail, but actually finding safety with the community. We represent everything they hate and we will succeed again. We did, for years, we will, again, New York City we'll come back. The amazing thing is two New Yorkers, constantly speaking against their own city, trying to tear it down and they're wrong and they'll be proven wrong.

Lehrer: As a quick follow-up Democrats at their convention barely mentioned the rise in violence this year. Was that a mistake or is that not a vulnerability in your view, as they continue to invoke New York from the other side?

Mayor: I think everyone in this country inherently knows we're going through a perfect storm, and if he just looked back to February, January, we were entirely different situation in terms of crime and shootings. I think people are smart. I think voters are smart. Of course they want to make sure that we are all safe and healthy, but the problem is the central concern right now around America is not an uptick in shootings, as bad as that is. What's killing Americans is the coronavirus and Donald Trump has dropped the ball repeatedly and no one believes, no one believes that Donald Trump has a solution to this crisis. He exacerbated the coronavirus crisis. How many people died as a result? So you want to talk about health and safety. That's the issue that's on the minds of voters, and that's another reason why Joe Biden will win.

Lehrer: Thanks as always Mr. Mayor, talk to you next week.

Mayor: Thanks. Take care, Brian.

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